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## Video Case Studies: Grounded Dialogue Matters Most

By Alvaro Galvis and Ricardo Nemirovsky

How do teachers engage with professional development video case studies and what do they learn from them? These have been some of the driving research questions of the Seeing Math Telecommunications Project (see also "[Seeing Math through Multimedia Case Studies](#)").

Using spring and fall 2002 data from teachers in South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, D.C., and Massachusetts, we have identified two critical aspects that make a significant difference in the depth and quality of the professional development outcomes:

- Grounding the discussion in the specifics of the video case.
- Integrating the events of the video case with actual ongoing events in the classrooms of the participating teachers.

To illustrate these points we selected the following excerpts from online postings in the Seeing Math professional development courses. We start with a facilitator's "seed" and two responses.

*Facilitator: How can the questioning strategies in this case study serve all the students, not just those in the middle but the strongest and the weakest ones as well? Do the strategies offer a way to strengthen teaching and learning for all these students simultaneously?*

*Teacher: I think that the questioning strategies and students' responses allow the higher level thinkers to rethink their process and allows the lower level students to gather more information on different processes that were used.*

*Teacher: I think that using a variety of questioning strategies strengthens all students. Students need to hear the way other students think and understand the processes. When a variety of ways are discussed, all students reap the benefits.*

Notably, these messages are devoid of specific references to the video case. Rather, the teachers respond with general statements reflecting their already held beliefs about the value of "questioning strategies" whose nature is not spelled out. The video cases play only a marginal or superfluous role in the exchanges. Further, we could not identify instances in which the teachers had changed or enriched their views.

In order to deepen the discussions and the rich potential of the video cases for teacher professional development, we realized the need to "ground" the discussions in the particulars of the video case and the actual experiences of the teachers in their classrooms. This shift of facilitator strategies was apparent during the fall 2002 course.

*Facilitator: What statements did you hear in the introduction that caused you to begin reflecting on the traditional method of teaching division? Did anything Mary Beth or Nancy said "ring a bell" with you?*

*Teacher: When they presented the arrays for division facts and then discussed using manipulatives, I realized that I had really reinforced the notion that mastering the algorithm for division was the be-all and end-all of division, rather than to help my students to develop a solid numerical understanding of what it means to divide and how to fluently describe division with language.*

*Teacher: Now I am starting to utilize the ideas presented with arrays - manipulatives and writing of problems. I am teaching multiplication now and will have the kids write their stories tomorrow.*

Here, the facilitator requests commentaries on particular utterances included in the video case. Teachers respond to examples in the video case with reference to the practices in their own classroom, regarding their own teaching.

The Seeing Math project has learned that sustaining rich, grounded discussions - grounded in the video case as well as in actual ongoing stories from the participants' classrooms - is the facilitator's major role. This role needs to be made explicit and actively supported.

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## Seeing Math's Vision



Video cases should:

- Be analyzed, not imitated
- Initiate shared inquiry about the object of study, rather than transmit a given teaching model
- Be authored by a professional group of producers and educators
- Adhere to a production standard, while allowing flexibility for the uniqueness of each case
- Exhibit a clearly defined pedagogy, as chosen by the creator of the video case

Teacher Professional Development using video case studies should have the following characteristics:

- Facilitator moderates from the side, not from the center - in either face-to-face or Web dialogue
- Discussions are driven by both professional and personal interests and needs
- Discussions are focused around both local and shared, "supralocal" issues
- Participants are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated and rewarded
- Discussions are grounded in video and classroom experience - not merely in participants' ideas and opinions
- Video case study and classroom practices are integrated